

THE

HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

JUNE 2003

JUNE HAPPENINGS

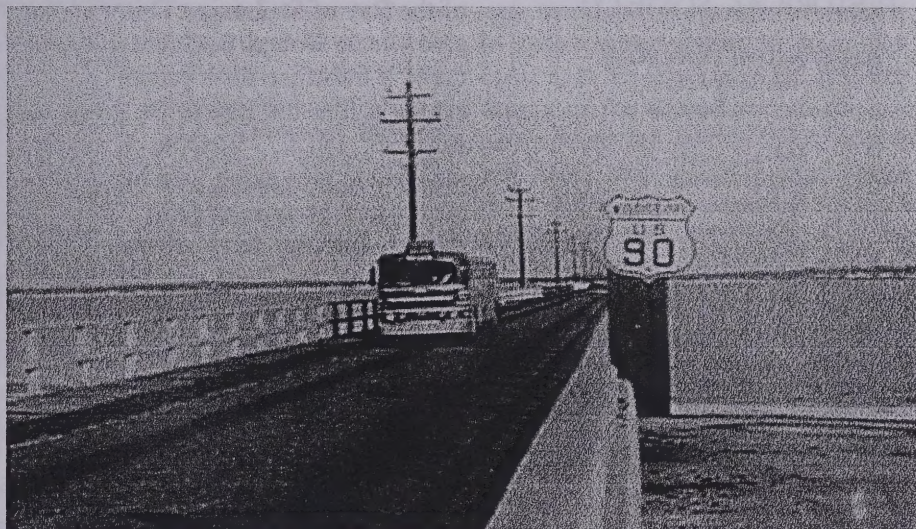
The monthly luncheon meeting will be held 12:00 noon, June, 19, at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker this month will be Major Bobby Underwood, Hancock County Sheriff's Office Chief of Patrol, who will be speaking on Homeland Security. Major Underwood is the Homeland Security Officer for the Sheriff's Department. Please call for reservations as the seating is limited. The cost of the luncheon is \$7.00, payable at the door.

HOME PHOTO PROJECT

Vikki Ryhiner has returned from Switzerland and is working diligently again on our home photoproject. Bay St. Louis homes are approximately 90% completed; Waveland approximately 40% completed. Volunteers are especially needed to photograph homes in the county. If you live in the county and would like to volunteer to photograph homes in your area, please let us know.

NEW MEMBERS

Hiram Baxter, Friendswood, TX
Betty Brockman, Hattiesburg
Charles E. Carter, Bay St. Louis
John Clark, New Orleans, LA
Elizabeth S. Reese, Waveland
Rose Fryer, Diamondhead
Gayle Schengrund, Wall, NJ



The new wooden bridge opened in 1928 allowing travelers easier access to coastal cities from Mobile to New Orleans.

With the appearance of the automobile in the 1910's and 1920's a demand was created for better roads, ferries, and bridges. Zipping along the coast from Biloxi to New Orleans, today's traveler might find it hard to relate to earlier travelers who had to detour almost thirty miles around the bay in order to travel from Pass Christian to Bay St. Louis.

Over the years the Bay of St. Louis has been crossed by ferry, a wooden bridge considered a "blessing", and then finally a nine million dollar four lane concrete structure that remains to the present day.

In 1921, Captain Ernest Drackett began operating the ferry *Cecil N. Bean* between Bay St. Louis and Henderson's Point. Autos traveled

on the lower, while dancing took place at night on the upper deck. On the Bay St. Louis side, the ferry docked at what is now the foot of de Montluzin Street: autos boarded via a steeply sloped ramp, and brakes had to be in excellent condition. Weather and tide played a deciding factor in the ferry's schedule, and often caused long delays for travelers.

Vivian Ramsay, historical society member, says she can vaguely remember someone, "holding her in their arms while riding the ferry across the bay."

After leaving the ferry, the route through town seems, to have been along the beach to Main Street, westward on Main to St. Francis, then south on St. Francis to the Lower Bay Road. Main Street

THE

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Editor - Dale St. Amant
 Publisher - Paul LaViolette

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LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

Monday — Friday
 10:00A.M. — 3:00 PM
 Closed from 12:00 — 1:00



OLG fourth graders from Ms Seay's and Ms Merigan's classes visited the Lobrano House on May 23. They were entertained by Kate Lobrano (portrayed by Dale St. Amant) with pictures and stories of Bay St. Louis history.

was cobbled with bricks from Toulme to St. Francis Street. After W.A. McDonald's stores at the corner of Main Street and Beach burned, a Standard Oil service station was built on that corner.

Horation S. Weston of Logtown, president of the Hancock County Board of Supervisors, thought that a bridge should be built over the waters of the Bay of St. Louis. This was not a new idea; Robert L. Genin had procured a franchise for a privately built bridge across the Bay of St. Louis as early as 1912. Weston, however, pushed the idea along with his associates until it became a reality. He contended that the ferry operating between Bay St. Lois and Henderson Point was slow, inadequate to handle the ever-increasing traffic, and dangerous.

As a result of participation between Hancock County, Harrison County, and the Federal government, a wooden bridge was built. It was constructed as a federal aid project, and financed with 50 percent participation of federal funds made available through the Mississippi State Highway Department. The balance of the cost was borne jointly by the two participating counties. It was built at a contract price of \$752,610.65. The bridge was under construction for 18 months. The first piling was driven May 1926. The original contract was awarded May 6, 1926 to J.B. Smith of New Orleans, but the actual work was not started until three months later. In December of the same year, it was taken over by Youman & Moore of Houston, Texas, for practically the same price.

The bridge was approximately 1.9 miles long and incorporated 491 creosoted timber spans, each 21 feet in length, and a 202-foot electrically operated draw-span. The roadway

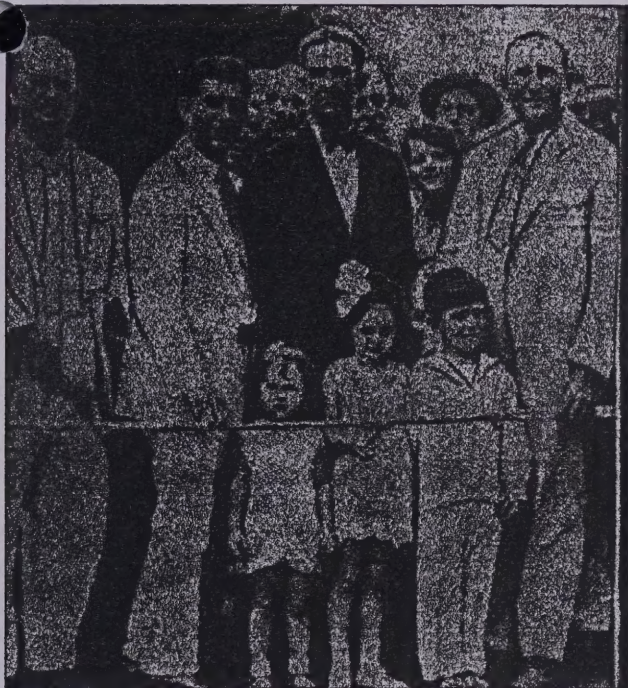
was 20 feet wide, with a 4-foot side walk on the north side of the bridge. Each bent supporting the trestle spans consisted of six pressure-treated creosote timber piles which were 50, 60, 75, and 85 feet in length. As added protection against marine borers, each pile was encased with vitrified clay pipe from a point three feet above mean low tide to slightly below the mud line. The structure used approximately 180,000 feet of piling and approximately 3,000,000 board feet of creosoted lumber. Four carloads of nails were used in its construction.

People were pleased with the draw-bridge which opened to allow boats and barges pass through. Few people displayed impatience when "the bridge was up" and many took advantage of the brief delay to stretch their legs, relax and enjoy the beauty of the shoreline.

The dedication ceremony was held March 2, 1928 Mayor Traub declared that day, from noon until 6:00P.M. to be a holiday, and requested all businesses to close during the celebration of the bridge dedication. He also requested that every private dwelling and every public place of business decorated with the tricolor for the occasion.

Vivian D. Prague (again our own Vivian Ramsay at the age of five years) daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney W. Prague of New Orleans and Bay St. Louis, cut the ribbon across the highway opening the new million-dollar beach boulevard and seawall. Other dignitaries present were Mr. H.S. Weston, Mayor Charles Traub Sr., and Lt. Governor Bidwell Adams and Supervisor of Beat 5, Emilio Cue.

Veronica Euphrasie Labat
 1913—2003



Little Vivian Prague (Vivie Ramsay) cuts the ribbon to open the new bridge and seawall. Also pictured: her sister Evabell (Eve McDonald) and Emile Gex (now deceased). Dignitaries include from right to left: H. S. Weston, President of Board of Supervisors, Lt. Governor Bidwell Adams, Emilio Cue, Supervisor Beat 5, and Mayor Charles Traub.

Traffic over the Bay of St. Louis had increased substantially since the opening of the bridge in 1928. Frequent repairs to the old wooden bridge delayed the flow of traffic. Several times, fire demolished sections of the span, requiring motorists to detour more than thirty miles around the bay. The city's isolation resulting from damage by the 1947 hurricane finally led local civic leaders to realize that a more stable and reliable structure was needed.

An act of legislature during the regular session of 1950 authorized a new bridge to satisfy this need. Immediately after the bill passed, the highway department began work on preliminary engineering for the bridge. Borings were made to determine foundation requirements and traffic studies were made to substantiate the sale of revenue bonds. In June 1950, the highway department retained the firm of Hazlett and Erdal, consulting engineers, from Louisville and Cincinnati, to prepare plans for the proposed bridge and to supervise its construction.

First estimates placed the cost of the bridge and approaches at slightly under \$7,000,000. On June 5, 1951, just

twelve months after the start of planning, bids were taken, and a contract awarded for construction of the bridge to Merritt-Chapman and Scott of New York City. The firm's bid was \$6,061,433, with a target date of June 30, 1953, for completion. A contract covering roadway and miscellaneous approach work was awarded in July 1952, to La Coste, Inc. of Gulfport for \$324,146.07. Two other contracts, covering paving and construction of toll facilities were awarded to Hyde Construction of Jackson for \$336,924.25 and \$133,262.20.

Construction began on February 1, 1952, directed by Charles B. Hill as resident engineer for the overall project. When test piles were driven, A soft spot about 800 feet long was encountered. Remedial measures were taken immediately so that there would be no damage to the bridge structure. The modification consisted of driving unusually long piling, 150 to 180 feet long, through this particular area.

Sections from Bay St. Louis and Henderson Point were erected simultaneously, rising gradually to a jackknife type span in the center. The bridge was four traffic lanes wide, divided by a neutral median strip. Just recently a wall was erected on the median. Each lane was 13

feet wide, with three-foot wide walkway on each side. A open-type railing design was used to allow motorists a panoramic view of the scenery. Mercury-vapor lamps were provided for nighttime illumination.

The draw section was of the double-leaf bascule type, a metal span 100 feet long that parts at the half-way mark and raises in two sections to allow water traffic to pass. An open span was incorporated into the design of the bridge in order to accommodate the fishing craft, pleasure boats and miscellaneous cargo craft that made up most of the boat traffic.

The new bridge was located about a half-mile north of the old western highway approaches at Ulman Avenue. New four lane approaches were built after some homes were demolished in order to make room for the highway. (The R.R. Perkins home and the home of Dr. Van Goren were two). The bridge was opened to traffic on August 1, 1953; it was completed at a cost of \$7,441,922.37. The total project was 3.75 miles long, including 1.93 miles of actual bridge. There was a twenty-five cent toll to cross one-way. However local residents and other frequent users could purchase a special ticket book, which brought the toll down to five cents.

The Coast Council of Chamber of Commerce acted as sponsors of the formal opening. The Dixie-Roto Magazine of the *Times Picayune* sent two reporters to take pictures and write a story to be released for the opening. Charles G. Moreau issued a special edition of *The Sea Coast Echo*, declaring that "...no public improvement for Hancock County ... has been so outstanding.

EDITH DAIGLE DANTAGNAN
1904—2003

THE PIERS OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Paul Estronza La Violette

We had a vicious storm yesterday. From our porch, I can see a long sand berm on the beach dropped by yesterday's wind-driven high water. Sitting on the berm is a twenty-foot section of someone's pier. Looking to our west, I see the long linear run of fragments that are the remains of Carrier's pier is missing its end.

What I am looking at is just part of several years' deterioration. I feel sad about this for several reasons. The most immediate is that the section's former position far out in the water gave fishermen a place to sit or store their gear as they waded fished. Now there are just the support poles sticking upright in the water and I see the pelicans have already laid claim to these.

I'm sad in a broader sense because I am looking at the ending of an era in our coastal history that extends back more than a hundred years.

In the early part of the last century and the century before, summer homes were built in Hancock County by people wishing to get away from the heat of New Orleans. Piers were an integral part of the beach homes that these summer people built. Piers such as Carrier's pier are relics of those days, long ago days, days before air conditioning. Along with gazebos and shoo-flies, these structures served the purpose of letting people go out in the cool of the evening and enjoy the land/sea breezes. People tend to forget there were times like that. They forget in the way they find it hard to think of a time when there

was no television and even further back, no radio. But there were such



The Sisters of St. Joseph enjoyed the cool breezes of their own private pier. The Order of Sisters came to Bay St. Louis in 1855 from Bourg, France to open a school for girls, St. Joseph's Academy which closed in 1967.

Photo from the Pat Murphy Archives

times and the piers of Hancock County are reminders of those times.

We think that the Coast as a resort is something new and that its impetus is due to the Casinos. The truth is the Coast at one time was a resort of great repute because of the very reasons that the piers were built. Our communities' closeness to the waters of the Sound tends to mitigate the higher temperatures common during the long hot summers. In truth, much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century growth of coastal Hancock county hinged on this fact.

In the late 1860's, families would come to the Coast from New Orleans to spend the summer. They built beach homes to get away from the miasma of the city in summer and to take advantage of the "balmy breezes and the good coastal airs." Their journey here was involved, first a train to Lake Pontchartrain then a steam packet to the Coast towns via the Rigolets. Anyone making the trip expected to stay for the summer. The towns changed to accommodate these summer residents and the few local merchants prospered by the expanded needs of a large fairly

fixed summer population.

All this changed when rail service between New Orleans and Mobile was completed in 1870. These fast trains brought New Orleans to within an hour's travel time of both Waveland and the Bay. Now, in addition to the long-stay summer visitors, people would come for the day or weekend. The area quickly became a fashionable place to go and Hancock County grew. Back then when people in New Orleans spoke of "the Coast," they were not talking about the Louisiana coast, but the Mississippi Coast. Large Hotels sprung up, with the Bay having as many as a dozen at one time. Claremont Harbor became a booming metropolis, rivaling the Bay. And these hotels followed the custom of the beach homes in building long piers to allow their guests to catch the breezes.

Those old hotels are gone and, unfortunately, so is the efficient train service. But many of the piers are still here. Old pictures of the Coast show that there were at one time hundreds of piers along the Coast. Hurricanes and other storms came and battered these piers and the aftermath of these storm's visits were marked by rebuilding surges that in-

cluded not only homes but the long piers as well, the owners feeling strongly that the piers were essential to coastal life and they were rebuilt as fast as they were destroyed.

In the main, these were private piers. This was a result of the old land grants and railroad deeds dated from before there was a beach road. Quite often the lots extended from railroad track to the waters edge and beachfront owners normally owned the land down to the mean low tide line.

In the case of Hancock County, the people that own beach property on the north side of the road have a claim on the land on their immediate south side. This claim by the property owners has legal arguments against it, but for some reason the county has ignored these problems and most beach owners pay taxes on what is for all intents and purposes, a public beach. However, if a legal permit is requested these property owners can build a pier in front of their house.

Hancock's beachfront is different than Harrison's. Our beachfront is bordered by a two lane county road. In Harrison County, Highway 90 borders the beach and the modern four-lane road discourages any feeling of personal ownership and the hundreds of piers that used to exist in Harrison County are all but gone.

As a result, Hancock County is strikingly unique. It is the only Mississippi County with a goodly count of these long wooden structures jutting directly into the Mississippi Sound. Like the county road that runs along our beachfront, the piers of Hancock County stand alone. However, this distinction is fast going away. As I drive along our local beach and see the number of piers most beyond repair, I think that time with the wonderful old piers is passing and the lonely piece

of wreckage sitting on the berm in front of our house is but a mark of its passing.

There are people that consider these relics and the few intact piers we have remaining as eyesores that intrude on the beauty and natural grace of the beach. I disagree. I feel the piers add accent to the beach scene much as the shrimp boats add to our view of the water. The starkness of their dark geometric lines provides a strong contrast to what would otherwise be often a static scene.

Besides, our sea bird, bless them, love the piers. Forget the gulls who believe their only real purpose in life is to whitewash all the piers in Hancock county, there are others, pelicans and herons and egrets and cormorants and on occasion black crows, hosts of others; all of them happy about the piers being here. While the birds would miss the piers if they were gone, we would miss more the wonderful display of life these roosting birds provide us to an otherwise purely physical scene.

Why are our piers in such bad shape? There are probably a several reasons, money, ennui, or just the passage of an era. I do know, however, when the present state of disrepair came into being. During 1998, two rather strong winter storms hit the Coast within a month of each other. Both washed away a great deal of sand and heavily damaged the piers along the coast. The first of the storms hit early in the morning. We had water over the road flooding our property almost to the base of the large oak nearest the beach.

As my wife and I stood watching on the porch, the water hammered and slowly overwhelmed the piers around us. Their destruction was mostly due to buoyancy. The waves would lift up the planks on the piers. If these were forced loose, they would go flying and become part of

the floating debris.

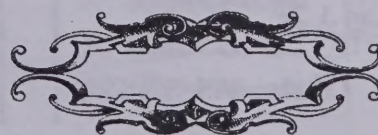
If the planks held, the rising water gradually lifted the very pier itself! The repeated pumping action of the waves lifting the planks would gradually work and work at the pilings until they came loose from the bottom. Once loosened the pier would slowly, almost majestically, lift up and then in a long twisting motion that tore parts from those pilings still holding, the loosened pier would topple over.

Beach property owners seem to have an ability to rebound after these natural catastrophes. As with storms in the past, many of the damaged piers had been rebuilt by their owners or were in the process of being rebuilt when a second storm month hit a month later. This second storm caught everyone off guard. Although windier, it came from a different quadrant to the beach and the wind direction could not push the water as high. Still the newly repaired piers started to topple over and we again watched the grand lifting and twisting dancing movements of the piers as each began their individual collapse.

That was in February 1998 and it appeared to take the heart out of the pier owners. After all, there wasn't really the need of these piers. Many were really maintained for sentimental reasons. A sort of memory of the way things used to be.

But these times are gone and other interests have created niches of comfort appearing more attractive than sitting and talking at the end of a wooden pier. In any case, very little repair work has been done on the piers since that time. Most remain as they were on the day of the storm, relics of the storms' power and the abandonment by their owners.

But there was a time...



PERSONALITY OF THE PAST



Captain CHARLES TRAUB SR.

January 3, 1881—May 27, 1967

Mayor Traub might have been called a conservative visionary in his day. He had a "spirit of enterprise and progressiveness" that spelled success, but at the same time was practical and wise in his economic plan, spending wisely "only such monies as necessary to benefit the city and better serve the people." Charles Traub Sr., served first as alderman representing Ward 1. Even then he was ever watchful of the progress and future expansion of the city. He ran and served as mayor in

1927 through 1932. During his administration the new wooden bridge was built and opened, also at this time the city purchased the first motorized fire engine which was kept in the fire station behind the high school (now the elementary school on Second Street)

Although Captain Traub, as he was called, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, he always claimed, " a soft spot for the Mississippi Gulf Coast and especially Bay St. Louis. It has always been a secret ambition of mine that someday I would be able to get over here and make it my home. This dream has been realized now for seven years, and the longer I live here and get better acquainted with the people the better I like it."

Captain Traub joined the New Orleans Police Department about 1901 serving 21 years before retiring to Bay St. Louis. Working himself up from patrolman to captain over the 21 year period, he commanded the 5th District which at that time included the French Quarter, dock area of the riverfront, and the Garden District. In 1922, he was the youngest office ever to retire from the force, and for a long time he was the oldest living retiree of the NOPD. The Department did not want to accept his resignation, but he had promised his family he would spend more time with them and stop putting his life in constant jeopardy.

"Besides," he said, " I longed to live in Bay St. Louis in the bosom of my family."

He and his wife had a daughter, Mrs. C.L. Reab, a son Charles Jr., and Warren (who later served as one of Bay St. Louis's City Commissioners). Carl Traub, his grandson now living in Colorado, recalls hearing stories about how Grandpa "lied" about his age and joined the 1st Louisiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment and served in Company L and M during the Spanish American War in Cuba. He also served for many years in the United Spanish War Veterans Association, and served as Senior Vice Commander for Mississippi as the National Adjutant. He was also a member of the Military Order of the Serpent a "secret" service group.

In later years, he was a Vice President and Director of Operations for Peoples Federal Savings and Loan (the Homestead) in Bay St. Louis, and a member of the Masonic Lodge for over 60 years. For many years Captain Traub lived with his family on Dunbar Avenue in Cedar Point before passing away at the VA Hospital May 27, 1967.

RICHARD FITCH
1923—2003

Clay Creations Jenise McCardell

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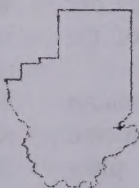
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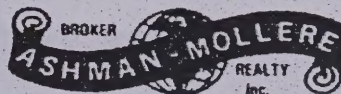
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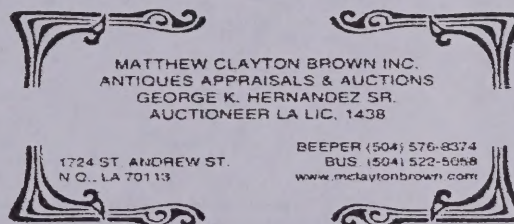
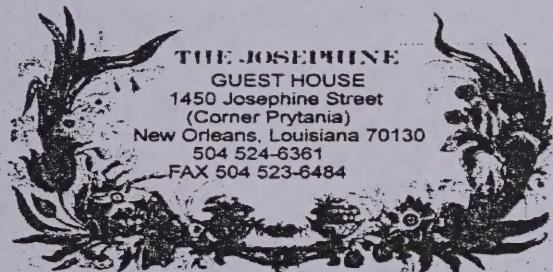
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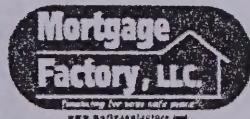
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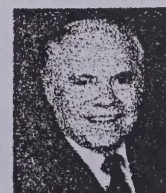
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